

REFORM AND REPEAL,

A SERMON

PREACHED ON FAST-DAY, APRIL 6, 1854,

AND

LEGAL ANARCHY,

A SERMON

PREACHED ON JUNE 4, 1854,

AFTER THE RENDITION OF ANTHONY BURNS.

BY JOHN WEISS.

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REFORM AND REPEAL.

TO WHAT PURPOSE IS THE MULTITUDE OF YOUR SACRIFICES TO ME? SAITH THE LORD. . . . WASH YE, MAKE YOU CLEAN: PUT AWAY THE EVIL OF YOUR DOINGS FROM BEFORE MINE EYES; CEASE TO DO EVIL, LEARN TO DO WELL; SEEK JUDGMENT, RELIEVE THE OPPRESSED. — Isaiah i. 11, 16, 17.

IF we consent to notice at all the day which the Executive appoints for a Public Fast, we should do it without reservation, in a religious spirit, and moved by conscientious desires to make a full exposure and statement of our delinquencies. A Fast is either a conventional support given to an ancient usage, whose foundation in the popular sentiment has crumbled away; or it is a solemn opportunity, deliberately embraced by men who are willing to grant their imperfection, to take counsel together in an atmosphere that is not vitiated by party feeling and that usually transmits the expressions of Christian faith. Our presence here forbids the suspicion that a day for public confession of sin may be hypocritically proclaimed and in the same mind observed. We are serious in our attendance here; we know that sins exist, and direct infractions of Christian law, and that we are not entirely irresponsible. We neither come to make confession of sin a public entertainment, or a brief moral excitement for the private con-

science, which shall be satisfied with empty feeling. It is to refresh our sense of Christian justice and morality, to contrast our methods of government and legislation with absolute principles, and to rekindle our hatred of oppression, of compromise, of political and moral servitude, that we are here.

In the presence of God, and in the act of worship, we forbear to indulge in any imputation of bad motives, or in personal indignation levelled against persons. We observe results, we deal with principles, we contrast the effects of associated action with the eternal sentiments of the Gospel. And if we find a principle of Divine equity, or a rule of common morals and decency, violated, we proclaim it because we reverence what is just, we confess it because we know that we are implicated in all the public manifestations which create government and carry on the life of a country. We dare not enter into the question of motives; we can only expose a corrupt level of sentiment. Men may live on such a level unconsciously, and may share its immoral actions in mechanical obedience to legal requisitions, out of gregarious instincts, and from lack of the highest enlightenment. Among other public evils, we find this coarse and oppressive one of assumption of criminal intent; and it is no better when combined with vindication of principles than when it is used against principle to eke out a defence of wrong. Moreover, the amount of character to be defamed may be great or little, but the sin of defamation is equally great in all cases, because impartial and unerring judgment is not within the capacity of man, even when all the lights of knowledge guide him, and his passions sleep; least of all when he is thinking and speaking in the dust of a conflict, stimulated by pressing

exigencies, hurt in his feelings, touched in his self-esteem, ruled by his sect or party. This is a great evil, and we are responsible for it, because we confine neither our tongue nor our heart in strict obedience to principles, but let them indulge in personalities; and when we fight, our vanity feels as much compromised as our conscience. There are degrees of defamation and depths of brutality; and when we see an extreme case, we indulge our outraged sensibilities. But for that very case we are responsible; for God has so involved us in a common life, that moderate expressions of passion countenance and nourish violent expressions of it; the imputation of a selfish motive couched in genteel phrases stimulates an imputation that is chopped out coarsely, with little regard to the blandness of art. A careless retort begets a brutal answer. It is *simply the tendency* to personal and partisan judgments that is accountable for the worst of them; and if a man is disposed to worship the impartiality of the Saviour, who showed us that it is practicable to unite sternness of principles with charity for persons, he will be equally disgusted, wherever he looks over the steaming plain of public life, equally repelled to see passion and selfishness alive under all banners, whether their mottoes are political or moral, equally discouraged to see men vitiate their principles with imputations and unbridled speech. And this is one manifestation of public depravity, and one characteristic of the national life, which we confess and mourn to-day. As we then proceed in this self-examination, let us arraign no individuals before the bar of our imperfect judgment; but rather take notice of results and phenomena, and proclaim their evil.

It is high time that the people of this country should scru-

tinize more closely the methods by which important acts of legislation are discharged. If we say that the two branches of Congress faithfully represent the people, we shall be justified in saying that transactions, which are called by courtesy legislation, are signs of public depravity; and that we are responsible for them, because we do not think it of sufficient consequence to purge and renovate the national councils by a sterner and more religious stock of men. These transactions occur under the ascendancy of both parties; without them it is supposed to be impossible to carry on the government, whatever policy may reign. Between parties there may be a difference of degree in this respect, one being less venal and notorious than the other; but that is all. When the representatives of the people arrive at the head of government, and become initiated into the routine of business, they seem to tacitly admit all the corrupt traditions of the place, and make no combined and uncompromising effort to abolish them for ever. Some admit them with personal complicity, others with indifference. No honorable attempt is made by the majority to do business without them. No league of puritans in love with justice resists and breaks the evil charm. It is a sign of great public depravity when men are unwilling to view a measure dispassionately, as the sworn servants of the people, confining themselves to its intrinsic merits, intent upon promoting the highest good alone, unbiased by their secret necessities. It shows how great a body of the people are unconcerned for a scrupulous morality in those whom they elect, when not a bill of importance can acquire vitality without the influence of a supplementary congress of committees flush of money, and agents expressly delegated to manufacture votes;

when companies of men can in this way reap enormous profits by the success of their projects; when speculation can swell and thrive upon grants of land almost fabulous for enterprises that are never expected to be completed, or that demand estimates far more economical; when one bill cannot pass until it is made a subject of barter, and balanced by another bill; when, in fine, every avenue that leads to the sacred centre where the firm and pure lawgivers ought to sit in calm deliberation, is besieged and choked by the men who think it right to pick up their living between the selfishness of those without and the selfishness of those within, whose faith is that every man has his price and that every measure is a marketable thing. Are we ready to confess that this represents the country; that the life which rests so proudly upon the common school and the corner-stones of ten thousand churches culminates into this display of unconscious vulgarity and corruption; that private justice, led through the artificial channels of party, becomes public wrong by the time it reaches its outlets; that personal honesty is at last represented by official corruption? And we are told that the conflicting interests of the national life admit no remedy. More than this; some people deliberately acknowledge, that, if a man would have any influence at the Capitol beyond the details belonging to his district, he must be a good shot, and all the better fitted to maintain his position and command attention if he understands the arts of the pugilist and has the unconquerable brain of the toper! If a man considers that he is put down, and politically annihilated, unless he retorts the fierce invective which seeks to stay his course, and is forced in turn to handle the popular weapons of intimidation, then the public integrity,

which the school and church are said to foster, is responsible to displace him by a man who fears God, a tranquil patriot, unseduced by the blandishments and unmoved by the violence of disappointed opponents. It ought to be the settled purpose of religious minds to give their power to men who remember the sincerity of the early days of the republic, and who do not submit to the delusion that the complicated interests of the present and the great development of various energies demand corruption in the ante-room, or vulgarity and unmanly deference and weak compromises upon the floor. The place which has been so desecrated by the presence of our coarsest traits and our most imperfect culture, where men emerge who have strength and tact without the refinement of religion, and who, having been trained to regard nothing but expediency, force their policy upon us in every department of the common life, ought to be swept clean; the Cromwell of indignant conscience ought to interrupt the low-minded debate, and scatter the creatures of the hour, never again to vex that sacred air with their confusion. Moral sense and Christian faith should make a league, and purge that place, and sweep its avenues clear of the agents of selfishness, and re-establish patriotism within, and support with mighty constancy the men who will test all things by justice and by principle,—support them, insist upon them, return them again and again, urge them as the living protests of outraged sentiment against everything that is less than magnanimous and righteous. Let the clear air of an awakened North, that has memories of ancestral virtue, and is converted by the Gospel, arise, and blow among those pillars, and sound in earnest beneath those domes, and blow, till every vestige of the present disorder is swept

out to oblivion, with its vicious rhetoric and its paltry stratagems; let it blow till the place becomes so sweet that it shall seem not amiss if the sincere dignity of the forefathers should rise there again, to utter the words which savor of Christian traditions, and recall the profligate republic to the cleanliness of its youth. Make it again a spot where religious faith may direct and modify personal ambition, and the character of the Saviour may be remembered well enough, at least to unfold there a higher consciousness, if not to inaugurate his holiest thoughts.

There is a theory which is beginning to obtain some credence, that the country will suffer nothing from public abuses and the errors of legislation. We are supposed to possess the recuperative power of a vigorous nature, which repels contagion and throws off disease, leaving all its vital functions undecayed. It is said that the capacity of the country is one thing, and the action of government another: however vicious the latter may be, the former transacts its business undisturbed, stretches its sinews in defiance of the threads of evil policy, and goes on its way conquering and rejoicing, entirely absorbed in realizing all its fervent tendencies. Some even maintain that one advantage secured by a democratic form of government can be seen in the facility with which security and happiness are preserved independently of any kind of legislation. The gross indulgences which the body politic absorbs and carries off would destroy a less elastic and reliant people. What a delusion is this, which could only be originated by conceit and unreflecting energy! It is the argument of an indefatigable Messalina. The vigorous youth may boast of the number of bottles he can carry off without a headache or the loss of a single hour on the morrow. Great is the

ability of rugged youth to bear the wrongs which indulgence must inevitably inflict; elasticity will conceal the ravages of vice, till its overtaken instinct can tolerate the folly no longer, and the hour arrives when Nature claims her just revenge. Then the shaken frame trembles after every pleasure, and the impotent and paralytic close impends. So is the republic presuming upon the recuperative power of its youth; with one hand it lifts the cup of profligate enjoyment, and with the other drives its free activities and releases expanding destiny from all constraint. And what is this engrossing ambition but itself a kind of profligate enjoyment, which hardens and corrupts the nation as surely as it does the man? Let us not be misled because we see that youth has also generous impulses, and develops much that is good. Vice nevertheless disorganizes. What is to make a republic independent of the law of God which causes misery to spring from folly? The world's history is nothing but God's commentary upon the text, "He that sows the wind shall reap the whirlwind." What undiscovered quality of nature repeals in our favor that text, and permits us to violate holy morals, superior to penalties? Will the vast extent of unoccupied ground, where migrating millions can settle and prosper, preserve health and virtue merely because it can keep up an animal content? Can the conscience and soul of the republic escape from justice on the broad, rolling territories where crops will grow in spite of evil laws? Will this popular absorption in the material interests of the continent divorce us from the effects of our own legislation, make the spirit of the country irresponsible, compensate for violations of justice? If the republic itself is not to settle with God for republican corruption, what shall

settle with God, or what is the invention by which this supple nation proposes to remove the sting from national indulgence, and to establish a new species of Providence in this hemisphere? Look for the root of this monstrous illusion in the popular idea of success. Because bad laws do not seem to interfere with money-making, — because the corrupt influences at the seat of government do not stay the printing-press, nor suspend the clink in navy yards and factories, nor prevent hospitals and colleges from being founded, — because habits of public profligacy do not impede, but rather accelerate, private and corporate enterprises, and the railroad usurps the track of the buffalo, and the new city springs full-grown out of barrenness, — because, in one word, youth may still continue to be youthful and enthusiastic, and health may laugh at croaking antiquity, — therefore the republic may be badly managed, and the national conscience set at an imperfect standard, and the numerous channels of public life may transmit the bad influence across the whole surface, with impunity. That it *does not* do so, be convinced, even now, in the hour of energy: see the retribution even now commenced in mental servility, in moral indifference, in obsequious political enthusiasm, in acquiescence in the existence and the effects of slavery. See the absolute principles of Jesus denied by the platforms of parties, who invariably accept what has been enacted, oblivious that they ever remonstrated and appealed. Is this success? Is this the maturity of power and vigor upon which we enter? It is rather the first touch of avenging paralysis. Let us return to temperance and chastity.

Yes, we have above all things cause for humiliation, that the moral sentiment submits so easily to the condi-

tions of slavery. On this point we can indulge in some salutary remembrances. Step by step the power of slavery has enlarged its limits, and magnified its constitutional privileges. It has succeeded in making the policy of the country one of deliberate compromise, till at last both the great parties acknowledge slavery to be a national interest, and freedom a subordinate principle, whose development must only be consistent with the safety of its proud antagonist. From the annexation of Texas to the passage of the Fugitive Slave Bill, what concentration and rapidity of triumph! It was foretold to us in clear and anxious words, that the element of compromise was stamped upon the national policy solely for the aggrandizement of slavery; and every step of its triumph was foretold. It was urged upon us that a doctrine of compromise, so far from bringing peace and settlement, was a doctrine fruitful of strife and agitation; and that anything like a finality was impossible so long as the theory of slavery was respected. And all such prophecies will be rapidly fulfilled, until the theory of no compromise, and constitutional amendment, acquires political embodiment. Those who prefer the alternative of waiting till slavery dies out, will leave the alternative to their distant posterity. Slavery desires nothing better than to hear us continually saying that we are content to have it stop just where it is; it will shift the stopping-place so long as our contented temper lasts. What keeps the country in continual agitation and alarm? Is it the principle of freedom? What makes all finalities obsolete and ridiculous? Is it the antislavery sentiment? Can we not see the settled purpose of slavery to make its life perpetual, and that for this chiefly it values the Union and the Constitution and the deferential North? To pre-

serve and extend its political dominion, to press new sap out of the old compromises, or, with equal singleness of aim, to cut down compromises that have lost their sap, to make the Union the mighty protector of its auctions and coffles, its hunting expeditions, its daily horrors and oppressions, — for this slavery trains its political sagacity, and consecrates the intellect and conscience of its children. We have been foretold this; we live to see it verified. We are convinced that, whatsoever single measure fails, the great instinct against freedom will not succumb: with every opportunity, and when least expected, it will send forth its tenacious purpose, in far-reaching contempt of our vaunted finalities; not simply desiring to be recognized and protected, but determined to prevail. Shall we trust it when we see its tact and resolution, — when we must know that every selfish impulse which enslaves the heart of man stimulates its efforts and keeps it sworn to self-defence and conquest? Our country is not excepted from the laws of retribution, and its wonderful vitality cannot be for ever braced against such a spreading malady. To say that peace and settlement will result from successive bargainings with slavery, is to say that health results while elements of death prey on the vital powers.

We must try to change all this, and that right speedily. Freedom is the great interest and central principle of this republic. To establish and perpetuate the blessing of freedom was it ordained, and furnished with these opportunities. To show that freedom is not only a universal right, but a necessity, did the counsel of God step westward, out of the traditions and encumbrances of Europe, to enjoy in this unpledged solitude another world. And this new domain, which has been kept for freedom, is com-

mitted to slavery, and this Union, which sprang out of a revolt against tyranny, is pledged to protect slavery; and this Constitution, which was made to express the Divine object in the settlement of this republic, to guarantee the enlargement of liberty, and to formally vindicate the rights of man, turns out to be a slave-whip in the hands of those who live and thrive upon the wrongs of man! And we, who have been divinely ordained to worship freedom, are to respect precisely that element in this free instrument which protects slavery! There is the root of this criminal inconsistency; and the conscience of freedom will have no peace till every slave element in the Constitution is repealed. That is the ultimatum of a united North, pledged with all its heart, with all its soul and strength and mind. Till that time comes, we shall all be held to our Antichristian bargain to return the fugitive. Against that bargain let this pulpit at least again pledge its profession of Christian discipleship, and let this Bible still seem greater and holier than the compromises of man. Though the floods of slavery cover all parties and obliterate all the ancient landmarks, may they rage around the bases of the Northern pulpits, and find that they are portions of the Rock of ages; from their incorruptible security let the golden rule be proclaimed to confound all compromises, and to inspire the hearts of men with horror at supporting injustice that they never would endure.

Doubtless it seems as if nothing but compromise could ever be the policy of this republic. At the sound of the word Liberty, all kinds of obstructions and political contingencies occur to us. That is because the heart is not filled with the reality of liberty, and it does not appear to us, as it did to our fathers, something religious and imperative,

which makes us pledge to it our lives, fortunes, and sacred honor. The political shifts of the moment seem more imposing than an immortal principle ; and because we are afraid to repeal a compromise, we content ourselves with re-establishing it. But when we say that Freedom is chimerical, we are withstanding God. He holds men responsible for freedom, as he does for faith and personal salvation. Freedom is God's project, the long-cherished intention of the infinite wisdom. If our hearts were burning with a faith for freedom, then slavery would be chimerical, and everything in the organic law of the country that supports it would be stricken out for ever. This shall be the policy of the future, to make the principle of freedom an element of personal religion, and to make its power aggressive, till it has put its enemy beneath its feet. Then slavery would indeed be remanded back to its natural limits, and kept within them, to meet the hour of its necessary retribution. And we should be free indeed, with the word Compromise stricken out of our papers and our hearts, and the hunter of slaves forbidden to call us his helpers. Repeal of constitutional slavery shall be the politics of the future, around which all questions of less moment and of temporal regard shall stand in their due places, while liberty prevails. If nowhere else, then in the Church of God the true faith of the republic shall be cherished, and its ensign shall be held aloft. Here we demand to be liberated from slavery, for the Bible is our Constitution, and we will compromise for nothing below its golden rule. On the pulpit steps at least the panting fugitive shall rest, and feel the Bible over him like the shadow of a great rock in a weary land. In churches shall independence be again proclaimed, and their bells shall again vibrate with the sacred word.

It shall be so interwoven with our creeds, that whoso accepts religion accepts freedom, and is consecrated to the idea of a pure republic. The purity and justice of Jesus urge us to the unalterable resolution. We will make the halls of legislation clean and righteous; its crowd of hangers-on shall be rebuked, and the air shall again circulate through its avenues; we will strike the fetters from our printing-presses, and make the syllables of liberty to come out clear and bold; we will make the Constitution one entire and perfect instrument of freedom, and then confidently ask the millions of the earth to behold the experiment of a successful republic. Do you care at all for this? Are we among those who are content, so long as nothing interferes with thriving? May God for ever prevent this country from achieving such success as that! May a notion of such patriotism never pollute the hearts of our children! If a man truly loves his country, he will love her health, and his effort will overleap the present moment to secure her future glory, founded upon consistency and liberty. Now may all the churches of the living God lift up their prayers for the day when our beloved country shall have in genuine success the reward of her obedience!

LEGAL ANARCHY.

LET EVERY SOUL BE SUBJECT UNTO THE HIGHER POWERS.—ROMANS xiii. 1.
WHETHER IT BE RIGHT IN THE SIGHT OF GOD TO HEARKEN UNTO YOU
MORE THAN UNTO GOD, JUDGE YE.—ACTS iv. 19.

THE Christian theory itself is able to solve this apparent contradiction in Christian teaching; and we shall find that it does this without damage to its reverence for human authority on the one hand, or for individual conscience on the other. Nothing can be plainer than the injunctions which we find in the New Testament to render obedience to an existing government, and to the powers with which it clothes certain persons in the name of law and justice. These injunctions are laid down without exceptions, and we cannot avoid perceiving that they are meant to contain a universal rule that guides human conduct through all the various developments of human government. And yet nothing also can be plainer than that the Apostles themselves sometimes disobeyed human ordinances, whenever these conflicted with an overpowering sense of individual duty, and God seemed more clearly established in conscience than He did in law. They did not shrink from taking the consequences of this disobedience; they were content to suffer violence rather than to violate the religion

which clothed them with their great commission. Their doctrine supports the majesty and sufficiency of law, as the representative of Divine justice and the preserver of rights and order. Their conduct sometimes appeals from law to the divine fountain itself, and they excite within us a consciousness that an absolute principle of the Christian religion is a higher law, as many times as human authority contradicts it. The Apostles do not serve us with a table of exceptions to law; our knowledge that they ever thought it necessary to make exceptions is only implied in their doctrine, though sometimes expressed in their conduct. They proclaim the great principles of religious justice, and assume that human law shall labor to represent and embody them. Holding, therefore, themselves a Christian theory of law, they unqualifiedly teach obedience to authority.

And this is the principle which reduces the apparent contradiction between their doctrine and their conduct; this principle, *that their idea of law was a thoroughly Christian one*. It also explains, in a manner entirely consistent with our private sense of right, all the passages which counsel so strongly submission to the higher powers,—that is, to existing modes of human authority. If you take those passages in their connection, you will be struck to see how they all contain the Apostles' idea that law itself is righteous, and a terror only to the evil-doer. If it had appeared to them that the general tendency of human development were to make the law itself an evil-doer, we should not find them teachers of loyalty. But as they take for granted that the human mind is making a providential effort to embody the Divine justice in governments and laws, notwithstanding the disturbances of human pas-

sion, they proclaim that men cannot enjoy the blessings of safety and progress unless they heartily support this system of law, which seeks to develop and protect the natural and social rights of man.

Let us examine some of these passages, to show how clearly they contain this principle. "The powers that be are ordained of God: whosoever, therefore, resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God." But how does this appear to be the case? It appears, "for rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? Do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same. For he is the minister of God to thee for good." What a union of Christian authority and simplicity; how impressively it rebukes and admonishes human law, while it seems so innocently to confide in it! It is clear to us that Paul paid his loyalty to his private Christian conception of human authority as the minister of God. Do we not already see how he teaches, implicitly, the possibility that exceptions may arise? His very theory, to which he summons unconditional obedience, justifies his conduct when he refused such obedience. "Wherefore ye must needs be subject," he says, "not only for wrath," i. e. not merely out of fear, "but also for conscience' sake"; because authority, which is presumed to be a minister of God, cannot be supposed to conflict with private conscience. "For for this cause pay ye tribute also: for they are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing";—namely, to preserve peace and comfort, and to enforce justice against the evil. Here we come upon the local circumstance which suggested this doctrine of obedience. The new Roman converts felt that the truths

which had been awakened in their minds made them subjects of an invisible kingdom, and responsible only to the Spirit which was present in their hearts. And the same scruple which was started while the Saviour lived arose again,—whether they ought to pay taxes to a heathen government. The answer of the Saviour implied that disciples were to obey every ordinance of an existing government; but when he added the clause, “Render to God the things that are God’s,” he vindicated his own religion for having abolished Paganism by the opposition of his disciples to the ordinances of idolatry and superstition. They did resist the power and suffer the consequences, whenever the things of God became involved. By making a special case out of the tribute, Paul, following the doctrine of Jesus, instructs them to disobey no laws and regulations of a heathen government that do not involve their personal religion. Tribute may be an inconvenient and even an oppressive imposition; yet they cannot refuse to pay it, when levied by the regular authority for the purpose of maintaining the general system of the laws. Unless that system is maintained, Paul has no safety as a Roman citizen, and his appeal to Cæsar before Festus would have been an empty phrase. Mark the distinction which Paul and all the early Christians make between paying taxes, which went in part to support a public idolatrous worship, and refusing to recant by assisting in such worship when threatened by the terrors of martyrdom. So can a Christian support the general powers of any government, for the sake of its average of law and order, while he refuses homage and duty to its heathenism. All this is involved in Paul’s doctrine that Law is the minister of God.

To be convinced of the unity of the apostolic doctrine upon this subject, let us examine some other passages that express it in the strongest manner, being careful not to wrench any single one from the natural connection in which they all lie imbedded. In the First Epistle of Peter we read, "Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake; whether it be to the king as supreme, or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evil-doers and for the praise of them that do well." Here again recurs the same assumption that the law is a righteous standard, judging vicious men and opposing their demoralizing tendencies: "for so is the will of God that with well-doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men," i. e. that by cheerfully obeying heathen ordinances you may refute those who ignorantly accuse you of acknowledging, as disciples of a new religion, no existing authority; "as free, and not using your liberty for a cloak of maliciousness." But supposing a heathen ordinance uses its legality for a cloak of maliciousness,—to persecute disciples and compel them to offer sacrifice to idols and to make their oaths to Jupiter,—then we find the early Christians refusing their obedience, because they saw that the law was attempting something beyond the punishment of evil-doers and for the praise of them that do well. They had all been reared in the conscience of the Saviour, who performed a Christian deed at a time that was illegal: they refused to perform an un-Christian deed that authority had rendered legal. And they suffered the consequences; "for this is thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully." The conscience towards God thus exalts itself above the secular authority, and Christianity quali-

fies its own doctrine of obedience, because the law itself contradicts the Christian theory from which its authority is derived. The disciple, for conscience' sake, will suffer, because he can neither actively nor passively countenance a legal outrage of his moral sense. He takes no oaths before God, much less before the statue of the heathen Jove. And how plain the deduction is, that a disciple cannot be accessory in imposing upon others what he is willing to suffer from only because he is unwilling to obey. And finally, in the Epistle of Paul to Titus, he reiterates his Christian theory when he says, "Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work." It is so clear that he presumes the magistrate to be coöperating with society for every good work, that we are not surprised when Peter and John are put in mind not to obey magistrates who decree that they shall not disturb the public peace by preaching Christianity. In such a crisis Peter places the restraint of an enlightened conscience upon this doctrine of obedience, and asks them to judge whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto them more than unto God. And when the council summon him, saying, "Did we not straitly command you" not to propagate these principles, he and all the other Apostles answered and said, "We ought to obey God rather than men"! How doubly winged with might is this right of conscience driven home to our hearts, when we see it wielded by the men who had been with Jesus, and had learned from him to thirst for righteousness and to obey the golden rule? How doubly careful should it make our conscience also to learn of Jesus, and to urge the rights of the individual soul, when he has made them known to us, with the force of

moral resistance, and, if it be necessary, with all the sufferings that power can inflict upon righteous disobedience !

Then from an examination of the Scripture doctrine, we find it pervadingly and strongly on the side of authority, but yet implicitly justifying Apostolic resistance, and assuming that exceptions may arise, making obedience to temporal authority sinful. But who, or what source of authority, shall decide, when such an exception has arisen ? It is plain from the Apostolic example, that our answer must be, Such a decision must be made by a conscience containing Christian principles. But, it is urged, by those who fear lest the authority of law become weakened, any conscience may pretend or imagine that it is inspired by Christian principles, and any man pronounce at pleasure that the law is vicious, and any crotchet may become an article of faith. Then the door is thrown wide open for all the disorders which breed in an agitated society, and there may be as many crises and revolutions as there are human idiosyncrasies. Any system of law is better than such a state of anarchy. Theoretically this is true : in fact it is nothing but an axiom to say that the restraint of an authority which is sometimes vicious is better than the dissolution of all society by the conflicting egotism of passionate and half-enlightened men. Nobody doubts that truism. But *practically* this danger is always very remote from every form of government ; for two reasons ; — first, because the law-abiding instinct is so powerful in the mass of men, that they are very slow to suspect authority, and the *genuine* call of conscience, in cases of exception, moves them with great difficulty ; and secondly because, in every civilized government, the infliction of gross injustice is very rare compared with its general administration of

rights and order. Such is a practical answer to a possible objection. The mass of men have an inborn faith in law, and the object of government is protection, an average security, general rights, and justice. Here let me anticipate rebutting evidence, which a famous case in history is always supposed to furnish. What made the French Revolution a period when all the follies that vanity could engender crowded each other in quick succession, in the names of truth and liberty, to be alternately quenched in the blood and tears of so many victims? Because it is a dangerous thing to give men an opportunity to exercise the rights of conscience? Far from it; no case in history shows us so clearly the dreadful revenge of spiritual dissolution that follows frivolous and arbitrary power. For a century had the throne been using its legality as a cloak for maliciousness, and philosophy, inoculated with this spirit of caprice, trifled with the laws of human faith, and robbed conscience of its pure and absolute Christian material. So when corrupt authority became suddenly extinguished, the whirlwind was reaped where the wind was sown. Sanguinary egotism triumphed, not because there is danger in conscience, but because conscience had been demoralized by legal crime, and priestly apathy, and philosophical frivolity. Out from the foundations of a sensual throne, that had maintained for generations its consistency of vice, burst these wild waves that tossed so tumultuously before they found their rest. Such is the lesson of that period, in favor of the rights of a *genuine* and healthy conscience, by showing how organized corruption can educate a people to tread the steps of vanity and blood. Anarchy had been sitting on the throne long before it drove its phantoms, in derisive swiftness of succession, through the

blood-stained streets. What kind of anarchy is so inwardly destructive, as that of a peaceful and triumphant iniquity? What disorder will compare with the orderly execution of a corrupt law? What strikes so bitterly at the inner peace, what relaxes so fatally the sense of moral obligation, and what shakes so rudely our reverence for a just and interposing God? What can we believe in, when disorder borrows all the elements and majesty of Law successfully to organize itself; when we see the powers that are ordained of God using their holy ordination to make a sin prevail? *If there were* danger in conscience, a thousand times better run that danger, than suffer the public sensibilities to be so shocked to see the Law, that servant of God, holding its ægis to shelter a corruption, and levelling its shining blade against the breast of justice. Can the preservation of material order atone for that? What shall it avail though streets and cities are never stirred from their propriety, if all the anarchy, impressing all the law, takes advantage of the public peace to wreak its will? The greater the tranquillity that attends the commission of a wrong, the greater is the tumult and disorder in the very citadel of human life!

But it is not enough to conclude that practically the right of conscience in a law-abiding community does not lead to anarchy. For a genuine conscience, in its indignation, may, like Peter in the garden, borrow the instruments of human passion to effect a righteous purpose. If Apostles have modified their doctrine of obedience by the exigency of a conscience, and if, therefore, we can find, in the last resort, no way for our individual salvation and no protection for truth except in the dictates of a Christian moral sense, how shall we use it in those rare cases

where the law violates equity and perpetrates what Jesus would condemn? How shall we use our conscience? In the first place, our opposition must never borrow the element of material force. We have no right as private citizens to maim or kill another citizen because he is in opposition to our conscience. The right of self-defence does not extend far enough to establish our personal principles by violence; however much legal or illegal power may outrage *them*, our resistance *must still partake of the nature of a principle*, and either suffer or conquer as a moral power. Because, violence introduces the whole train of personal vices, revenge, pride, hatred, bloodthirstiness, into the service of the spiritual nature; and the alliance is an abomination to the temper in which a Saviour's truth was glorified. You never heard of violence being undertaken in a pervading sense of religious sanctity; and men, struggling hand to hand and foot to foot, with white lips and flashing eyes, are never filled with the venerable dignity of the principles they may have soberly espoused. The animal must raven and triumph over all the spiritual powers, and indignation must sink down into fury, before a man can kill another man in the service of truth. That original service to which the genuine conscience bound itself has then been exchanged for the service of wrath; Justice drops her scales, and with madly uplifted point, but with still blind-fold eyes, rushes into the middle of a brawl. No wonder that violence has so often destroyed the causes that hate its agency, and have no communion with its bestial deeds.

And especially in a republican form of government, where the voice of an enlightened people is the check to tyranny, and the grossest wrong might drop, with a silent vote, away to oblivion, violence defeats its purpose. It borrows

the spirit of the very outrage it is opposing, and turns it into its appropriate emblems of the club and sword. With these it aims blows, not against those who are responsible for originating legal outrage, but against those whom the public peace employs. Is it strange that the popular instinct hastens to array itself upon the side of material order, and the powers that be triumph once again over the power that ought to be? It is hard enough to induce a law-abiding people to lift its conscience above its legal duty, and to acknowledge that an exception has arisen where obedience is unchristian. Where the work is going on of creating a public opinion upon conscientious grounds, the anarchy of a mob reacts in favor of the anarchy of an oppressive law. Violence lifts a Medusa's head, with all its dripping snakes, before the melting conscience, and freezes it again to obduracy.

In the second place, we must oppose injustice by refusing to lend it personal aid and countenance. We must not be impressed into its service; we must withdraw on every side, resolute to suffer penalty, but not to abet iniquity, and leaving the law to perform its unholy function as it can. It shall be demanded of us in our serious moments, during our uplifted prayers, and at the hour of death, if our hands or voices have ever aided men to violate the law of Christ. It shall be asked if we preferred to take our portion with the oppressed, or to strengthen by even the favor of a look the office of the oppressor. Remember that in another world than this we meet the liberated fugitive, where the pressure of authority can no longer serve us with a pretext; and there shall God remind us of our Saviour's words, — "Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me." Such

moments of triumphant conscience come to us before the day of our death, and the sorrow of Jesus seems repeated in the person of the fugitive, from whom the curse of man withholds the benefit of the golden rule. Can we countenance the power of law in inflicting upon him what would be worse to us than death? Can we feel the fount of honor springing bravely and refreshingly within us, if our remotest act has been a link in his fetter? Shall we use our liberty as a cloak for such maliciousness? Let the law rather couple us with him, and send us both to the servitude from which he escaped with such exulting hopes. Surely, honor would find that fate sweeter than the remembrance of having helped a man to kidnap! Can law make us do that thing? Let the gaol hide us from the sweetness of day, — let fines confiscate all our substance, before a whisper of our breath helps to push the slave back again into his misery. So aid us God, to abhor the office and duty of policemen to oppression.

In the third place, we must oppose this iniquity by attempting to repeal it altogether. Dark and bitter is the future to us, liable to continual disgrace, teeming with the opportunities of agitation and disorder, full of moments that shall goad to unexpected madness, unless we are able to do this thing. The sense of loyalty in the heart of this people will be shattered by the successes of this unholy law. Remove the anarchy that lives by authority, before the anarchy of awakened passions fills the street. Preserve in the people their salutary sense of the sacredness of Law, and let them worship her as the unblemished servant who has received her ordination at the hands of God. Pull from her white attire, which adorns her as she sits in judgment, this bloody mantle which expedient men have thrown

around her, and let her garment have a hem that we can stoop to kiss with honor and devotion. Can we be any longer seduced to believe that the blessings of peace and Christian grace can reign among us, and that injustice can be a fountain of harmony? Step by step has the power which governs us proceeded to the accomplishment of its deliberate policy, and every step has shown that the next has been premeditated; it passes with equal indifference over solemn contracts made with man, and the still holier principles of Divine equity. It depends upon our loyalty to be its passive servant to the end. And it is now, as ever, the duty and office of the Christian pulpit to ask the people to judge whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto men more than unto God. The health and vigor of the public conscience stand affected, and the efficiency of public worship to keep alive the memory of a perfect Saviour, to preserve it from the stains of dissolute compromises, that it may be our guide and judge, a counsellor of Christian loyalty, a comforter to the oppressed. How far the shadow has crept over us while we have slept! It lies across our altars, it would fain creep so high as the voice of the preacher, and touch his prophecy with paralyzing chill. Shall we be loyal to the extent of extinguishing the source of true loyalty in an uncontaminated Gospel? Where shall Law build her foundations, and where shall Justice plant her pillars, except upon that cornerstone? It is a duty of religion, as well as a dictate of morality, to remove what brings so great a scandal upon the divine ordination of authority; that the life of the people may tranquilly rest upon assurance of justice, that patriotism may be as large as duty, and that all our inheritance of manliness from former times may be kept devoted

to the liberty which they secured, and be no longer held to service as slavery's protector. Into this solemn purpose the success of this or that party cannot enter: let not the fatal name of party be so much as mentioned in connection with this sacred duty. Where the health of conscience and the purity of law are concerned, where a clear conception of the Gospel's redeeming principles is involved, but one hope should light us on the single path which we must tread, that all men may come together into the power of one opinion, to demand repeal, and with single-mindedness to demand it, till the voice grows loud enough to confirm its claim. Do not let the side-whispers of party mingle with its clear and certain tone, for it is to proclaim a holy mission, being no less than that of reinstating the sanctity of law and withdrawing the countenance of a Christian people from the ways of the oppressor. If our heart be single, free from ambitions, and filled with the power of truth alone, we shall see Divine justice win a perfect triumph. Then at last we shall enjoy peace united with honor, because we shall have sealed up the source itself of anarchy. And let this be our prayer: O God, who hast brought us thus far in the path of our destiny, fill our souls with the heavenly light of a true purpose, that we may make our testimony in union and devotion, and cause our future to repay with righteousness thy mercy to us in the past.